

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTV #0283/01 0251048
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 251048Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9036
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAHQA/HQ USAF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEADWD/DA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUENAAA/CNO WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 1593
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 8347
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 1476
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2360
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 1572
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 9326
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 2305
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 9213
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 9682
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 6329
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 3716
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 8591
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 2821
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4730
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 5760
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000283

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

SIPDIS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. State of the Union Address
- [1](#)2. Mideast
- [1](#)3. Israel: Governance

Key stories in the media:

The Jerusalem Post highlighted a part of President Bush's State of the Union Address: "We could expect an epic battle between Shi'a extremists backed by Iran, and Sunni extremists aided by al Qaeda and supporters of the old regime."

All media quoted Olmert as saying on Wednesday at the Herzliya Conference that in the face of the Iranian nuclear threat, Israel reserves the "right to full freedom of action in defense of our vital interests." Likud Chairman MK Binyamin Netanyahu was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that the "guiding purpose" of the GOI, from the Prime Minister on down, must henceforth be to thwart the genocidal ambitions of Iran's Islamic extremist regime.

Yediot reported that today Vice PM Shimon Peres, FM Tzipi Livni, and PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas will participate together in a World Economic Forum (WEF) panel in Davos dealing with Israeli-Palestinian relations. Israel Radio also cited the participation of those figures in the WEF discussions. The radio quoted Pakistani PM Shaukat Aziz as saying in Davos that the time is not yet ripe for a dialogue between Pakistan and Israel.

Yediot reported that a senior diplomatic source told the newspaper on Wednesday that senior US administration officials recently sent a message to senior GOI sources in Jerusalem that the administration is disappointed by the IDF's performance during the war in Lebanon. The sources were quoted as hinting that the outcome of the war is liable to set hurdles for future wars of Western countries in the Middle East. The media reported that on Wednesday Defense Minister Amir Peretz, who testified before the Winograd Committee probing the war, explained the decision-making process that took place the day the war broke out. Peretz was also asked if the objectives of the war had been defined before hostilities began and what predictions the defense staff had made regarding the war's duration. Peretz was also asked how much Israel knew about Hizbullah's capabilities on the day the war started, July 12. Peretz spoke about the decision not to launch a major ground offensive at the beginning of the fighting, although there was a detailed plan for such an offensive. He was asked about the decision to launch the large ground operation in the last two days of fighting, after the cease-fire had been planned. Yediot quoted Peretz as saying before the committee that he had allowed the IDF freedom of action during the war and that the IDF had been neglected prior to his entering his post.

All media reported that last night, in a speech broadcast on all electronic media and echoed in banners in all major newspapers, Israel's President Moshe Katsav asked for a leave of absence but vowed that he would not resign following a decision by Attorney General Menachem Mazuz to indict him on a series of charges, including rape and sexual harassment. Katsav swore to leave office should Mazuz formally charge him. All media reported that on Wednesday PM Ehud Olmert told delegates to the Herzliya Conference that he had no doubt that Katsav could not continue to serve in his position. Katsav denied the accusations against him, calling them lies that had reached every home in Israel. "I never hurt any man or any woman," he said. "I did not do any of the deeds of which I am accused." He said he would fight the accusations with "every last breath." The President singled out the media, saying he has survived the past six months and a "media lynching" because he believes in his own innocence, despite a "media court" that has not sought the truth. "I have survived because truth is on my side," he said. Katsav also accused the Attorney General, state prosecutors, and law enforcement authorities. Leading media quoted Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter as saying that the President "has vilified the 28,000 police officers who work day and night for the sake of security."

Leading media reported that the Knesset's House Committee appears nearly tied on how to vote on Katsav's request for a leave of absence. The media reported that Minister of Justice/Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni has called for Katsav's resignation. Leading media reported that the Foreign Ministry has instructed Israel's representatives abroad to emphasize the fact that nobody is above the law in Israel, as exemplified by President Katsav's case.

Yediot reported that Lebanese PM Fouad Siniora, who arrived in Paris on Wednesday to attend a summit of countries donating funds for the

reconstruction of Lebanon, told the newspaper that Israel will not achieve anything by force and that full peace will only be reached in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Yediot reported that settlers have desecrated graves of Palestinians near Nablus with the complicity of the IDF.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a number of Christian families from Bethlehem have decided to break their silence and talk openly about what they describe as Muslim persecution of the Christian minority in the city.

The Jerusalem Post cited the Iranian Fars News Agency as quoting a well-informed source that Saudi Arabia's National Security Council Secretary Bandar bin Sultan is due to visit Tehran today for talks

SIPDIS
with senior Iranian officials.

Yediot and other media reported that Israeli businessman Yuri Markovich Karnapolsky was brutally murdered in recent days in Kazakhstan. The media also reported that Israeli journalist and Jewish Agency activist Konstantin Borovko was killed by unknown assailants in Vladivostok in eastern Russia.

Over the past few days media reported that archaeologists have discovered the main street that linked the Temple and the "City of David" (now in Silwan in East Jerusalem) during the Second Temple period.

The Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday, at traditionally Jewish Brandeis University, former US President Jimmy Carter defended his book, "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid." The Jerusalem Post reported that Carter's speech got "mixed grades" from students, and quoted Harvard Law Prof. Alan Dershowitz as saying in rebuttal that Carter dodged the issue of the Iranian threat.

Maariv reported that US law enforcement and customs authorities have embarked on a wide-ranging operation to deport illegal immigrants, including Israelis.

Yediot presented the results of a Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll:
-"Should President Katsav resign now?" Yes: 71 percent; no: 29 percent.
-"Which figure is fit to be the next President of Israel?" Shimon Peres: 45 percent; Rabbi Yisrael Lau: 22 percent; Likud MK Reuven Rivlin; Labor MK Colette Avital: 8 percent. [NB: The Knesset elects the president.]

1. State of the Union Address:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Bush proposed ambitious goals showing that his administration understands the significance of the hour at hand. Reducing dependence on foreign oil is one of the decisive strategic objectives for America's future."

Block Quotes:

"Echoes of Nixon"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (1/25): "Since Nixon's 1974 [State of the Union] Address, there has not been a president who appeared before Congress in such a weak political situation. But there is another Nixon comparison, an instructive one, that has evaded analysts. Just as Bush did Tuesday night, like other presidents in the past, Nixon asked in 1974 that America's dependence on foreign oil -- that is, primarily Arab oil -- be reduced. Today there is a war on global terror.... How similar Bush's message is to Nixon's, how

similar are the reasons. Another 30 years will tell if the failure is also similar. In any case, oil consumption has gone nowhere but up, and dependence on foreign sources has increased since Nixon's 1974 speech.... Bush proposed ambitious goals showing that his administration understands the significance of the hour at hand. Reducing dependence on foreign oil is one of the decisive strategic objectives for America's future."

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Labor Party Knesset Member Colette Avital, her party's official candidate for Israel's Presidency and a former senior diplomat, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "A meeting of top Israeli politicians with members of the Arab League to discuss the Arab initiative is timely and necessary."

Block Quotes:

"Say 'Yes' to the Saudi Peace Plan"

Labor Party Knesset Member Colette Avital, her party's official candidate for Israel's Presidency and a former senior diplomat, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (1/24): "The recent war in Lebanon, Islamic radicalization, and the threat posed by Iran to all have created a realignment in our area. Today we share common interests with the moderate Arab states. Surely those who hold this view should take advantage of this opening. A meeting of top Israeli politicians with members of the Arab League to discuss the Arab initiative is timely and necessary. Even though an agreement with our neighbors, be they Palestinians or Syrians, can be reached only through bilateral negotiations, the constructive involvement and support of key Arab states is crucial. This year should be one of renewed peace efforts. Time is of the essence, for in the absence of a political process violence can only increase as the flow of armaments to extremists continues. Official Israel should therefore not remain locked in a rejectionist stance. We should not turn a blind eye to Syria's overtures; after all, its sincerity can easily be tested. For once, let us take yes for an answer."

13. Israel: Governance:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "[The] interaction [of the IDF's new chief of General Staff] with the government, on the one hand, and the vision, priorities and culture he carves out for the IDF on the other will be central to Israel's well-being these next few years."

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Even when Katsav is replaced by another politician, the effect will only be to perpetuate the existence of a superfluous institution."

Block Quotes:

1I. "The IDF's New Leader"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/25): "The appointment of Gabi Ashkenazi as the IDF's next chief of General Staff is now just a rubber stamp away, as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has accepted the recommendation of Defense Minister Amir Peretz. And while the appointment must still be approved by a committee on high-level nominations and by the cabinet, praise for the choice of Ashkenazi is already pouring in.... With an emboldened Hizbullah on our border, a possible nuclear showdown with Iran looming, and the conflict with the Palestinians anything but abated,

the incoming chief of General Staff will face extraordinary tests. Halutz is going, but the political leadership that oversaw last summer's conflict is still in place, and far from having retrieved the public's trust. The IDF's new leader cannot restore public faith in our military-political leadership single-handedly, but all of Israel surely wishes him well in the difficult work that lies before him. His interaction with the government, on the one hand, and the vision, priorities and culture he carves out for the IDF on the other will be central to Israel's well-being these next few years."

II. "Opportunity to Get Rid of the Presidency"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (1/25): "The symbol of the country has been covered with a big, ugly and foul-smelling stain. That is the feeling aroused by the indictment being formulated against Moshe Katsav. But even when Katsav is replaced by another politician, the effect will only be to perpetuate the existence of a superfluous institution.... What exactly has the Presidency contributed to national unity and to mending the rifts in Israeli society? Did [Ezer] Weizman and Katsav help in any way to mend the rifts of Oslo, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the days of Binyamin Netanyahu, or the disengagement from Gaza? Was the President's Residence a genuine home for minorities and marginal groups? Weizman's expression of unity was an urge to antagonize the prime ministers who served alongside him, and Katsav insulted the Reform rabbinate and damaged our relations with Diaspora Jewry.... The problem of the Presidency is that it is based on an insoluble dilemma: If the president speaks and expresses opinions on public issues, he will be controversial and will interfere with the elected government. If he is silent, who needs him?"

JONES